

Veraestau
(Holman-Hamilton House)
Holman Hill Road
Aurora
Dearborn County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-184

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IND,
15-AUR,
1-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

Addendum to:
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Addendum to: VERAESTAUI HOUSE
(Holman-Hamilton House)

HABS No. IN-184

Location: Holman Hill Road, Aurora, Dearborn County, Indiana

Present Owner: Mary O'Brien Gibson

Present Occupant: Mary O'Brien Gibson

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: Veraestau is significant architecturally as it represents a well executed blend of architectural styles from four different historical eras. It reflects its architectural development in the blending of Federal, Greek Revival, and Vernacular elements conveying a sense of both utility and beauty. It is also significant for its historical association with persons of local, state, and national prominence.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: In 1810 Jesse Lynch Holman acquired the land on which he built Veraestau. In that year he built the earliest part of the house—a log structure which no longer exists. Shortly thereafter he added two rooms of brick construction which now constitute the oldest part of Veraestau. Holman named the house "Veraestau" derived from Latin roots for spring, summer, and fall. Allen Hamilton, Jesse Holman's son-in-law, purchased the house in 1838 and added to the house in that year. Veraestau was owned by the Hamilton family until 1933 when it was purchased by Cornelius O'Brien. His daughter, Mary O'Brien Gibson, has owned the house since 1953.
2. Dates of erection: 1810, 1838, 1913, 1937.
3. Architect: unknown
4. Alterations and Additions: The original log structure burned circa 1838, leaving two brick rooms. Allen Hamilton added the Greek Revival portion of the house to the east side of the brick structure in 1838. This was a symmetrical, three-bay, one-and-one-half story addition, facing the Ohio River to the northeast. In 1913, under direction of Margaret Vance Hamilton, the two-story portion of the house on the southeast side was added as well as a second story sleeping porch above the 1838 entrance portico. Also added at that time were dormers on the rear (west and north) sides. In 1937, Cornelius O'Brien expanded the house to the west, adding three rooms of brick construction.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Jesse Lynch Holman, original owner of Veraestau, studied law in the office of Henry Clay who remained a life-long friend. Holman was admitted to the Kentucky Bar in 1805. He is regarded as Kentucky's first native novelist, and after moving to Indiana in 1810, he became Indiana's first "resident" novelist. More importantly, he served for fourteen years as Judge of the Indiana Supreme Court and for eight years as Federal District Judge in Indiana. Holman was a delegate to the Indiana Constitutional Convention at Corydon in 1816 when the state's first constitution was drafted. He was defeated in a United States Senatorial election by one vote in the legislature.

Jesse Holman laid out the town of Aurora in 1819 and remained a civic leader there. He was active in the creation of the Indiana Historical Society in 1830 and served as its vice president. He was also a Baptist minister in Aurora and one of the founders of Franklin College (Indiana).

Jesse's son, William Steele Holman, was born at Veraestau in 1822. He was elected to the United States Congress sixteen times and had served in the House longer than any man in American history. He became one of the foremost Congressional leaders and was known as the "Great Objector" and the "Watchdog of the Treasury."

Prominent locally and regionally was Allen Hamilton, a native of Ireland who married Emerine J. Holman, eldest daughter of Jesse Holman. Hamilton was a merchant and banker in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and he bought the Holman house in 1838 and added the Greek Revival front addition. Both Hamilton and his brother-in-law William Holman were members of the Indiana Constitutional Convention when the present state constitution was adopted.

In the twentieth century, the two most distinguished members of the family were Edith Hamilton, famous classicist and author of The Greek Way, and her sister, Dr. Alice Hamilton, specialist in industrial diseases, first woman on the faculty of Harvard University, and author of Exploring the Dangerous Trades. Both were granddaughters of Allen Hamilton and spent time at Veraestau.

Cornelius O'Brien (1883-1953), who purchased Veraestau in 1934, was a successful farmer, banker, and manufacturer. He, like the first occupant of Veraestau, was active in the Indiana Historical Society, and as an early advocate of preservation contributed varied and substantial services to the efforts of historic preservation in Indiana, especially the White Water Canal restoration project in Metamora.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Veraestau represents four periods of construction — 1810, 1838, 1913, 1937. Each addition was executed with attention to unity of design. The result is a somewhat organic and informal structure with some degree of refinement which, being located in an idyllic setting, is thoroughly charming.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. The house is U-shaped in plan, being composed of four rectangles of individual construction dates. The 1810 portion is rectangular, approximately 18' x 30'. The 1838 addition is one and one-half stories and measures approximately 32' x 42'. The 1913 addition, also one and one-half stories, measures roughly 23' x 63'. The 1937 addition is single story, 24' x 32'. On the front (north-east) side are two matching porticoes which extend 5' from the east facade.
2. Foundation: coursed stone
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The 1810 portion of the house is brick common bond, with load-bearing walls. The 1937 addition is also brick. The remainder has interior wood framing with clapboard siding. Exterior walls are painted white.
4. Structural System: The 1810 portion of the house and 1937 addition are masonry. The 1838 Greek Revival addition, as well as the 1913 addition, are wood frame with clapboard siding on the exterior.
5. Porches: On the front (east) facade are two matching porticoes, each with an upper level, screen-enclosed sleeping porch. Each has two pairs of square columns and two pilasters. The columns support a wide entablature with dentil course. The portico of the 1913 addition houses a screen-enclosed porch. There is a side porch (16'6" x 7') under the roof of the 1937 addition on the south side.
6. Chimneys: There are six rectangular, brick chimneys located throughout the house, some being flush with the walls and some interior chimneys.

7. Openings:

- a. Doors and doorways: The formal entrance is on the east side, shielded by classical portico. The single door is set in classical surrounds, with five-light side lights and two-light transom. The principal entrance is on the east side, set in classical surrounds. Secondary entrances on the west (rear-facing) facade of the 1913 addition receive similar treatment, typical of Colonial Revival style. There are two doorways on the north facade of the 1810 portion, each with flat, radiating brick lintels and multi-light transoms.
- b. Windows and Shutters: Window treatment varies according to period of construction; those in the 1810 portion are 9/9 sash windows with flat, radiating brick lintels. Those in the 1838 addition are 9/9, double-hung sash windows with modest classical molding and hinged, louvered shutters. Similar treatment is given to the windows of the 1913 addition, with some variations, and some wooden casement windows.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is gabled with a rather low pitch, covered with asbestos shingle. The roof is of various heights owing to the complex design.
- b. There is one gabled dormer at the center of the east facade, set between the two sleeping porch dormers, also with low-pitch gable roofs. On the rear sides (west and north) of the 1838 and 1913 additions are long, shed dormers which constitute the upper level.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

- a. Basement: There is a basement under the 1838 and 1913 additions, the 1838 basement having six rooms and the 1913 basement having three. The basement is accessible by a staircase in the room western-most of the 1913 basement which descends from the kitchen.
- b. First Floor:

The first floor is entered from either the east or west entrances. These lead to a hall which is at the center of the 1838 addition. To the north of this hall, accessible through two doorways, is a large parlor (originally a pair of matching parlors) with a pair of fireplaces on the north wall. The 1810 portion, which consists of two rooms of unequal size, is entered through

a door at the west end of the parlor. The larger of the two 1810 rooms is used as a den.

To the south of the main hall are two doors of which the easternmost leads to a sitting room; the other door leads to the stairhall. The stairs are L-shaped, with a small landing and landing window on the west wall. The sitting room and stair hall formed the south end of the 1838 addition.

South of the sitting room and the stair hall, accessible through both, is a large dining room, with dining porch at the east end. At the west side of the dining room is a door which leads to the kitchen and service area through a hall. Off this hall to the south is a small breakfast room. The kitchen, dining room and dining porch belong to the 1913 addition.

To the west of the kitchen is the 1937 servant's or caretaker's apartment. This consists of a bedroom at the east end, a living room at the west, and a central bathroom. South of the living room, but not connected internally, is a small storage space. There is also a porch on the south of the 1937 addition.

- c. Second Floor: The second floor, which extends over the 1838 and 1913 additions, is reached by the stairs in the stairhall or by stairs from the kitchen. Both stairways lead to an L-shaped hall. Over the 1838 addition is one large bedroom with two closets and sleeping porch, and a bathroom, north of the second floor stair landing. Along the north side of the 1913 addition is a hall; four bedrooms and two bathrooms enter into this hall. The easternmost bedroom has a sleeping porch.
2. Stairways: The main stairway is located in the 1838 addition, to the south of the main hall. It is U-shaped, with two landings. There is a rear, or servant's, stairway in the 1913 addition. This is straight, with another set of stairs beneath it leading to the basement.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceiling are plaster-finished. The walls have been papered, ceilings painted.
4. Doors and doorways: Doors are paneled, with wooden classical surrounds, painted white.
5. Trim: There is narrow trim in the large parlor and the dining room, painted white. Wide baseboards, also painted white, are found throughout the house.
6. Hardware: Door hardware is relatively simple; the earlier doors have exterior latch and lock mechanisms.

7. Lighting: There are electrified, glass chandeliers in the principle rooms of the first floor.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces east/northeast; it is situated at the edge of a steep hill, overlooking the Ohio River some 427 feet below. The house is approached from the northwest on Holman Hill Road.
2. Outbuildings:

Stable and Garage: This structure was constructed in 1937 by Cornelius O'Brien in a style similar to that of the house, especially the 1913 addition. The stable/garage faces northeast. The garage, at the southeastern end, has a gabled roof and is entered from the rear so that the front facade, which is brick has three small windows. The stables, at the northwestern end, have a three-bay facade, with gabled roof and shed roof porch and sheltering staff doors. Between the garage and the stables is a central work room and tack room. This has a cross-gable roof and is taller than its flanking wings. The entrance is set in colonial revival surrounds: central door with side lights and large, three-part, round transom with decorative keystone. The door is flanked by paired pilasters and entablature returns. At the center of the building is an octagonal cupola with copper roof and weather cock. The garage and parts of the central work and tack room are brick; the entrance bay, stables, and gable ends are clapboard. All surfaces except shingle roof and weather cock are painted white.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation initiated by the owner with the assistance of a grant from the Indiana Department of Historic Preservation and Archaeology during the summers of 1981 and 1983.

The project was under the general supervision of Robert Kapsch, chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Team Supervisor was John Wells of Ball State University, Department of Architecture. Student Assistant Architects from Ball State University who prepared the drawings for the project were Allen W. Berentes, John J. Isch, and Gregory A. Kil.

Completion of the data book and photographic documentation was undertaken during the summer of 1983 by Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. Directed by Thomas M. Slade, the photographs and description were executed by J. Marshall Davis.

For more information, see VERAESTAU HOUSE, STABLES HABS No. IN-184-A